

1

A place I have never been to before,  
but intrigued about since childhood.  
Bihar or Mumbai, as the indenture spirit  
is at a standstill: archives in me  
as I make much ado about history,  
or being a gymnast late at night with  
images from *The Royal Reader*.  
Tigers roaming, elephants marauding,  
Shakuntala again pouring out with rain.

Where my ancestors have come from,  
I pretend to acknowledge or not understand,  
having denied other places from times past,  
or living with lore of the Amazon instead:  
evergreen forests bolstering a greenhouse  
effect as environmentalists talk loudest.

2

Now in Ottawa in an Indian restaurant  
with a Mexican name, the waitress takes in  
Chandra Mohan, our Indian guest in authentic  
attire, who mutters about Chairs of Canadian Studies  
in India, or ways of making Canadian Literature  
better known to a billion people there, all  
in Delhi, Calcutta or Chennai, and where else?  
Now James Reaney's an institution, he adds,  
though he likes Margaret Atwood best.

So I ask, *Why the interest in Canada?*  
Indeed it's about Rudy Weibe's *Big Bear*,  
Robert Kroetsch's post-modernism,  
or language-use in the Prairies, while I come  
to grips with a tropical itch, being  
foreign-born and mulling over ways  
of coping with identity in Canada.

Post-colonialism strides I contemplate  
 with Nehru's jewel-in-the-crown test or tryst  
 with destiny, Empire being what my forefathers took  
 less seriously while I'm here in the Great White North:

a Susanna Moodie frontier in me,  
 as I claim to be a drawer of water and hewer  
 of wood, or dwell on a garrison state because  
 of the giant neighbour to the south,  
 survival instincts merely--

Imagining continents that were once together,  
 as metaphors indeed make the world one;  
 and I again conjure up images like false truths,  
 reinstating Mowgli because of Kipling,  
 being astride an elephant and trundling along  
 in a jungle safari with mahout shouts,  
 blowing my horn because the British had been  
 in India longest.

Now self-contained with aspirations  
 or a further quest, I think about what might  
 have been in Jaipur or Shimla, or some other place  
 unknown to me while yet being a maharajah  
 in an exotic wilderness.